

## Frozen Noah 5784

Rabbi Joel Simon, a colleague in Tampa, shared with his synagogue board that as American Jews, we are like Noah. I found this so powerful and the connection unmistakable.

Noah is said to be righteous in his generation – a generation filled with lawlessness, hate, rage, and evil. The word in Hebrew to express this evil is **סמך**, a fascinating coincidence which relates to the actions of modern Hamas terrorist organization whose name is an acronym for the Islamic Resistance Movement. Noah, like us as American Jews and like those all around the world, are struggling to figure out how to be better than the evil in the world. How can we hold multiple realities at the same time? Israel has a right to stand up for itself – as Ambassador Dennis Ross said last night, what other country would be willing to live next to a terrorist organization? Human life is sacred and no innocent civilians should be harmed. Hamas, the terrorist organization, brings about death and destruction to not only Jews but to the Gazan citizens – it reigns **סמך**, evil, terror, all around. We are like Noah, looking around us and trying to be righteous amidst chaos and a lack of understanding.

Like Noah, we are watching destruction around us and feel overwhelmed and hopeless – frozen. In most of the Torah portion of Noah, we don't know what he is feeling or thinking. In Genesis 7:16, after the flood waters began and Noah gathered his family and animals onto the ark, we read “And God shut him in.” After Noah followed God's commandments about building an ark, why does God have to shut him in? Rabbi Adam Stock Spilker, a colleague of mine in St. Paul, Minnesota, said God had to shut the door “because Noah faced the horror of what was actually happening and that he did not protest for the 120 years of building the ark.... Noah saw all his family who wouldn't make it on the ark, all his friends, all the animals outside, and was frozen.”

I have to say that this is exactly what I have been feeling – frozen. Frozen in my feelings. Frozen in my reactions. Frozen in how to respond to people who support the destruction of life that Hamas has brought about. Frozen in so many ways. Sure, I have responded and done what I can. But my feelings of anxiety and sheer shock have made it feel like I am frozen, and the world is spinning out of control around me. A world I desperately want to slow down and shake and say, pay attention to the people – to the life – to the hate that is causing all of this!! God knew that Noah was having this paralysis and had to intervene to save him. I need to look for the ways that God is shutting the door to save me – from myself, from being consumed by news and updates, from being able to be here for our congregation as we all are dealing with so many feelings. Maybe we all need to look for the ways that God is “saving us.”

“As American Jews, we are like Noah.... We are within the protection of the Ark but still feeling vulnerable to the storm” (Rabbi Joel Simon). How true this is as we are over 7,000 miles away from Israel. We are not susceptible to rocket attacks or sirens alerting us to run to shelters. We are not seeing the destruction, devastation, and grief firsthand. It doesn't mean we don't feel it – God knows I do. We are feeling vulnerable to that storm, especially as antisemitism is strongly on the rise in the US, on our college campuses, on our streets, in our media. At the same time, we feel that sense of distance in miles as the protection of the walls of the ark, giving us space between us and death and destruction. It is a tension that is so difficult to put into words but is felt by so many.

Noah probably also had a lot of feelings. We don't hear his words, but we understand by his reaction what he is feeling. After being on the Ark for 40 days and 40 nights, Noah exits the ark and plants a vineyard and gets drunk by the wine created from the grapes. Until this year, I always thought that Noah's drinking and behavior was due to him being selfish; celebrating that he was able to live, and that God gave them the blessing of the rainbow as a sign of God's

covenant and promise to never wipe out all of the earth. But this year, I'll never look at it the same way again. Noah can't handle the reality of the world around him – missing so much of what his life consisted of before the Flood. His trauma is too much for him to bear. I'm disappointed in myself for judging Noah so quickly. Because I am watching from afar, but the reactions it is causing in me – the sleepless nights, the inability to detach from a constant barrage of news reports and social media posts, a need to check in with every Israeli I know – those are real reactions, and it is traumatic.

So many of our reactions are due to the tensions we are holding all at the same time. I can't speak to everyone's, but I can speak to mine. For the past 10 months, I have been wishing I could chant בּוֹשֶׁה!, embarrassment, with my Israeli brothers and sisters who have been protesting the Israeli government week after week. I am horrified by some of the decisions of the government and what that makes Israel look like to not just Jews, but the world. **At the same time**, I recognize that Israel has a right to defend herself, to take a stand against terrorism, to say “never again” will we let this happen. **At the same time**, I worry that Israel's decisions immediately following the attacks on October 7<sup>th</sup> were blinded by rage and grief, ignoring humanity of both their own soldiers and civilians and the civilians in Gaza. **At the same time**, those civilians in Gaza are being used as human shields by Hamas while Hamas won't let them evacuate, have stolen the humanitarian aid that has been given from those who need it, and who choose to hide in underground tunnels – complex, pathways and rooms – while they refuse to build shelters for civilians living above them. In the past 14 days, I have been wrestling with all of this – the complicated nature of what is conflict in the Middle East.

But here's what is not complicated. Hamas has no regard for human life, of any kind. Hamas is to blame for nearly everything happening in Israel and in Gaza. Hamas is who and what we should be banding against to rid the world of terrorist ideology as best as we can. Hamas will not let me stop being a Zionist who believes in having a Jewish state in the world and can criticize what it looks like today or any time in the future. Hamas will not let me stop being Jewish and being proud of it. Hamas will never divide the Jewish people. I will not stop letting Trevor wear his Hanukkah or Greene Family Camp gear to school. I will not stop my boys from singing Shema every night before bed. I will not take mezuzahs off my doors. I will not stop being your rabbi. I will not stop being proud of my Judaism.

After the Flood, God makes a promise to never destroy every living creature again with the symbol of the rainbow. This rainbow is also about memory – God remembering what happened, God remembering the feelings of Noah, God hearing the cries of all that were destroyed, God remembering that things are complicated and not so black and white. Now it is incumbent upon us to remember. We must remember that even in our anger and frustration, grief and fear, sorrow and anxiety, we are told by the prophet Habakkuk “In wrath, remember compassion.” (3:2) Remember compassion.

May we take this to heart as American Jews who are like Noah. May we strive to be as righteous in our generation as we can be, just like Noah. May we look for ways to not be frozen in our feelings, but to take care of our mental health and move us towards recognizing our feelings safely and healthily. May we recognize our struggle in feeling safer because of the distance while acknowledging our vulnerabilities, fears, anxiety. May we recognize the tensions that arise and find common ground with all of them to eradicate חִמּוּס – the lawlessness, evil, and hatred of the world around us. May we realize that we are all experiencing different feelings and that our reactions to them will vary from person to person. May we be there for one another in those feelings. Most of all, may we remember that compassion is above all else and that the goal

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of achieving peace cannot be accomplished without each one of us putting in the work. Ken Yehi Ratzon, may this be God's will.